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Master Metals closes for good

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Seven months after Master Metals Inc. was shut down for lead pollution, the company said it has no plans to reopen.

A permanent closing would end one chapter for both the lead smelter and for regulators frustrated by the company's repeated failure to protect workers from lead exposure and to halt air pollution.

However, shutting down the plant raises questions about clean up of the W. 3rd St. operation, which in 1992 was deemed the worst lead-polluter in the state and possibly the nation.

Responsibility for cleanup at issue

The cost has not been determined, but "whatever it is, it is well beyond the scope of Master Metals," said Joseph Rutigliano, a lawyer for the company.

He said the company will press its lead suppliers and former owners of the property to help pay the cleanup bill.

Meanwhile, the Ohio Attorney General's office asked the company this week for specific plans for cleaning up hazardous-waste areas, including waste piles and storage bins.

No decision has been made on whether

federal Superfund dollars or state cleanup funds will be used.

"That's one of many options," said Carol Porter, a spokeswoman for the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency.

The Ohio EPA shut down Master Metals in August for health-threatening violations of air-quality standards.

The agency later said the company needed to build an enclosure for its smelting operations before it could reopen.

Master Metals used the smelting process to extract lead from batteries and other

materials. At one time, it had about 50 employees.

Rutigliano said yesterday it recently became clear that reopening the plant didn't make economic sense. While the company is open to a sale, he said that option seems unlikely.

William Gruber, chief assistant law director of Cleveland, said yesterday he is frustrated by the latest event.

"In one way, we've achieved what we initially sought — to stop direct polluting into the air from their operations," he said, "but it's not an overall victory because we still have employees losing their jobs" and the need to clean up the site.

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